Dunlap Ranch
Belle Ayr Coal Mine Permit Area
13 Miles south of Gillette
Campbell County
Wyoming

HABS No. WY-112

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80255

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
DUNLAP RANCH

I. INTRODUCTION

Location:	Belle Ayr Coal Mine Permit Area, Campbell County, Wyoming S-1/2/SW/SW/SE Section 30, T48N-R71W; NW/NW/NW/NE, NE/NW/NW/NE, SW/NW/NW/NE Section 31, T48N-R71W
USGS Quad:	The Gap SW, Wyoming 7.5′ (1971)
UTMS:	A.13/465265/4882890 B.13/465325/4882890 C.13/465325/4882930 D.13/465410/4882930 E.13/465410/4883020 F.13/465465/4883020 G.13/465465/4883110 H.13/465265/4883110
Dates of Construction:	1914 to 1951
Present Owner:	Meadowlark Farms, Inc.
Present Use:	Abandoned; coal mine permit area
Significance:	The Dunlap Ranch is associated with dry land farming/ranching on the semi-arid lands of Campbell County in the early twentieth century. The ranch retains ten original or early buildings that represent the evolution of the property from a wood frame homestead dwelling to a ranch complex that includes barns, outbuildings, and a cement block house constructed in 1951, the final addition to the complex. The ranch retains good physical and environmental integrity.
Project Statement:	The Dunlap Ranch site is scheduled for destruction in the future, due to mine expansion. The approved mitigation plan for this National Register eligible site consists of Historic American Building Survey (HABS) recordation.

Historian:

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October 1990, revised February 1992

II. HISTORY

A. LAND SETTLEMENT IN CAMPBELL COUNTY, WYOMING

The region that now comprises the State of Wyoming was settled quite late in the nation's history. Arable land east of the Mississippi River had been taken up prior to the Great Westward Migration to Oregon, California, and the Salt Lake Valley that began in the 1840s. Although thousands of westbound emigrants passed through the region on the Oregon Trail and other east-west migration routes, their goal was to reach more fertile lands to the west. The rapid populating of these fertile areas, coupled with the development of the cattle industry and Texas Trail drives in the late 1860s and 1870s, impelled the cattlemen to turn their attention to the northern plains.

With the building of the first transcontinental railroad through what is now southern Wyoming in 1867-1868, distant cattle markets could be easily reached, and the vast grass and sagebrush covered lands of Wyoming Territory were found to be conducive to the fattening of livestock. Thus, Wyoming became more attractive to the prospective stock raiser. Unfortunately, the federal land policy already in operation had been conceived under far different environmental and climatic conditions east of the Mississippi River. Therefore, the various homestead acts passed by Congress to settle the public domain involved land parcels that were too small for successful stock raising operations in the semi-arid environment of Wyoming Territory.

Although the prairie grasses proved nutritious to livestock, up to forty acres of range land were needed to maintain each animal. Congress belatedly recognized the needs of the western rancher and farmer, but the resulting alteration in the land laws was piecemeal and often occurred too late to save the homesteader. Such untenable measures as the Timber Culture Act of 1873 assumed that a homesteader on the northern plains could grow large stands of trees on semi-arid submarginal lands. The Desert Land Act of 1877 assumed that the West could be made to bloom like the eastern United States merely by irrigating unwatered lands. Legislators failed to realize that few year-round water sources existed in large portions of Wyoming Territory, and those that did were already usurped or controlled by the earliest arrivals.

The cattlemen were the first permanent white settlers to utilize the vast grasslands of Campbell County. However, they had been prevented from moving into the region until a government treaty in 1876 removed the indigenous Native Americans to reservations outside the Territory. Several large

cattle outfits were established within the present confines of Campbell County along the major drainages, and vast cattle herds roamed the intervening rangelands. The disastrous blizzards of 1886-1887 accompanied by overstocking of the range destroyed many of the large cattle barons and ended the open range system of ranching. As a result, the cattle industry of Wyoming was depressed for many years. Ranchmen learned to fence their lands and developed hay meadows for winter food supplies during severe storms.

B. THE DRY LAND FARMING MOVEMENT

The dry land farming movement reached its height in Wyoming after 1900 at a time when the cattlemen were still rebuilding the industry. Dry land farming involved a series of techniques that conserved available rainfall in order to grow crops in semi-arid regions. This method of farming assumed a basic minimum annual rainfall of fifteen inches. The dry land farming movement proved to have a profound effect on settlement in the Powder River Basin and Campbell County. Coupled with increased immigration to the United States and the increasing scarcity of good cheap farming land, homesteaders turned to submarginal lands throughout Wyoming with these new farming techniques.

Dry land farming had been tried in Wyoming Territory in the late 1870s at a small Swedish settlement called Salem, about forty miles northeast of Cheyenne. The Campbell system of farming, developed by Hardy W. Campbell, had been used in Nebraska and Kansas. His theory was based on storing and conserving the natural rainfall by compressing the subsoil and keeping the topsoil loose by cultivation; it also entailed leaving parcels fallow and keeping the surface free of moisture-robbing vegetation. [1] The theory of dry farming is sound, and it is still practiced today in Wyoming. Nevertheless, a basic minimum amount of rainfall is necessary; below that amount, dry farming is not possible. Wyoming encouraged dry land settlement of its semi-arid lands through a Board of Immigration created in 1911. Newspapers extolled the virtues of dry land farming; the railroads conducted a well organized advertising campaign on a nationwide basis to settle the regions through which they passed. Doctor V.T. Cooke, an "expert" in the technique from Oregon, was brought to Wyoming in 1905 and appointed "Director of Dry Farming Experiments" with funds appropriated by the state. [2]

Wyoming's chief proponent of dry land farming was Frank W. Mondell, who later became mayor of Newcastle and a congressional representative. Mondell had practiced dry land farming techniques from 1889 to 1893 on his farm five miles northwest of Newcastle. He authored the 1909 Enlarged Homestead Act, which allowed a homesteader to file on as many as 320 acres and further encouraged farmers to immigrate to Wyoming. Despite droughts in 1910 and 1911, dry land farmers in Wyoming experienced good years in 1912 and 1913. However, these successful efforts were centered in southeastern Wyoming south of the North Platte River. [3]

The federal government also lured homesteaders to western lands by the Stock Raising Act of 1916, which allowed an individual to file on as many as 640 acres of land that the Secretary of the Interior had classified as "stock-raising lands." Such lands were suitable only for grazing and the raising of forage crops, did not have any timber, and could not be irrigated. [4]

C. GILLETTE AND THE CREATION OF CAMPBELL COUNTY

The town of Gillette was created when the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad was built through the region in 1891. Frank Murrey, Robert and George Durley, and Charles T. Weir were employees of the contracting firm that brought the railroad through Campbell County. They each filed pre-emption entries of 160 acres and received patents on July 25, 1891. These homesteads were purchased by the Lincoln Townsite Company, owned by another group of railroaders, and the town was platted that same month. Lots were sold for $1.25 an acre, and within three months Gillette was a thriving community with a mayor and justice of the peace. The first shipment of cattle left Gillette in August 1891.

Gillette continued to flourish during the early years of the twentieth century, growing to 151 by 1900, 285 by 1905, and 448 by 1910. It became the county seat when Campbell County was created from portions of Crook and Weston counties in 1911. By the 1915 census, Gillette had grown to 505 people, and Campbell County had a total population of 2316. Most of the residents were engaged in farming and ranching. Only 7.4 percent of Campbell County residents were listed as foreign born. These statistics verify that the coal industry that was to play a major role in the economic growth of the county had not yet developed beyond small wagon and ranch mines. [5]

The most intensive period of homesteading activity in the eastern Powder River Basin and Campbell County occurred in the late 1910s and early 1920s. Promotional efforts by the State and the railroads, the prosperous war years for agriculture in 1917 and 1918, and the Stock Raising Act of 1916 with its increased acreage (but lack of mineral rights) all contributed to this boom period. A large amount of land filings consisted of existing farms and ranches expanding their holdings in an optimistic economic climate. However, an equally large number of homesteaders had been misled by promotional advertising and were not adequately prepared for the trying experiences that awaited them in Campbell County. It soon became apparent to the aspiring dry land farmer that he could not make a living by raising only crops. Some were initially successful in growing crops of wheat, oats, barley and other small grains, along with hay, alfalfa, sweet clover and other grasses for an increased number of cattle. A drought in 1919 was followed by a severe winter. The spring of 1920 saw market prices fall for cattle and sheep. Those homesteaders who were not ruined by the turn in events became small livestock ranchers and limited their farming to forage crops and family garden plots. Some were able to obtain cheap land as it was foreclosed or sold for taxes. During the 1920s the size of homesteads in Wyoming nearly doubled and the number of homesteads decreased, indicating the shift to livestock raising. [6]

For most of these small ranchers, irrigation was impossible due to the lack of year-round water sources. Availability of water was the major limiting factor for these early twentieth homesteaders. The creeks and drainages were intermittent, and reliable springs were scarce. It was often necessary to dig a well fifty or more feet deep to strike water. Most homesteaders relied on a combination of water sources, employing wells and cisterns to hold rain water and snowmelt. It was often necessary to haul water from distant year-round water sources.

D. THE GREAT DEPRESSION: THE END OF THE HOMESTEADING ERA

The high agricultural prices associated with increased demand during World War I prompted many farmers and ranchers to use their profits to purchase more land, equipment, and seed. The Stock Raising Homestead Act of 1916 with its 640-acre parcels was ideal for this expansion by existing homesteaders. Unfortunately, agricultural prices began plummeting after 1920, and farmers preceded the rest of the nation into the Depression by using their wartime profits on expansion rather than debt reduction [7].

Ironically, farmers and ranchers in Campbell County fared better than those in most portions of Wyoming during this time period. Between 1919 and 1929 the amount of cropland tripled, numbers of sheep doubled, and cattle also increased. Like many of its counterparts throughout the state, the Bank of Gillette failed in 1923. However, farmers and ranchers of Campbell County who were able to survive the early 1920s experienced good years in the late 1920s. [8]

This short reprieve was quickly followed by the Great Depression and a series of severe droughts in 1930, 1931, 1934, 1936, and 1939. Those small farmers and ranchers who were not ruined outright persevered but, no longer able to make a living from the land, became dependent on relief. Tax delinquency was therefore commonplace, and county governments had difficulty maintaining roads and administering school systems.

The Resettlement Administration created by Executive Order on April 30, 1935, began purchasing homesteads that were abandoned or operating at a loss on marginal lands. Prices ranged from $2.05 to $2.21 per acre, and purchases continued into the 1940s. These lands were to be returned to their original status as grazing lands. Some of the residents on purchased lands were resettled on better lands, upon which they might become self sufficient. These consisted of separate farms scattered throughout existing farm districts or settlements. A portion of these purchased lands were consolidated and formed the Thunder Basin National Grasslands, which now cover a large portion of Weston County, northeastern Converse County, southeastern Campbell County, and an isolated block in northeastern Campbell County. Campbell County contains 446,363 acres within the Grassland boundaries, consisting of mixed federal, state, and private ownership. The Soil Conservation Service administered the Thunder Basin project and was concerned chiefly with reclaiming the land that had been overgrazed and overcultivated during the dry land homesteading boom. Three grazing associations were established to administer grazing on the Grasslands, issue permits, and collect grazing fees. The administration of the Thunder Basin Grasslands was turned over to the Medicine Bow National Forest on January 1, 1954. [9]

In 1934, the Taylor Grazing Act and two subsequent Executive Orders were passed that withdrew the remaining public domain from entry, thus virtually ending the homesteading era (except on certain reclamation projects). Its intent was "to stop injury to the public grazing lands by preventing overgrazing and soil deterioration, to provide for their orderly use, improvement, and development, to stabilize the livestock industry dependent upon the public range." [10]

Five grazing districts were set up in Wyoming and local advisory boards were established for each. "Cooperation was in a sense a necessity, for the stockmen had the knowledge and experience required for a successful administration of those lands." [11] These lands were then leased by permittees who were charged fees. A portion of the fees collected was used to improve the range. Within the grazing districts were many blocks of private and state lands. The act authorized these for exchange for lands elsewhere, so that federal holdings could be consolidated for better management and administration.

The federal government had finally realized that the eastern Powder River Basin and other large portions of Wyoming and the West were not suited to large-scale or even modest subsistence farming. It was pastoral land, profitable if properly administered and regulated, and carrying a smaller number of larger operations, better suited to the character of the land and climate.

III. THE DUNLAP RANCH

A. HISTORY

The Dunlap Ranch was established in 1914 by Charles Oscar Dunlap and his son William Oscar Dunlap (the latter known as Oscar). Charles, the father, was born on March 8, 1851, in Wheeling, West Virginia. He moved to Nebraska in 1884 and made his home in Giltner. His son Oscar was born in 1892. Together they moved to the Powder River Basin after looking for land in Montana. Charles and Oscar chose their parcels in 1913 and moved onto the land in 1914, building their dwellings that same year. Mrs. Charles Dunlap died in 1914 and therefore may never have lived at the ranch. Initially, Charles Dunlap lived in the stuccoed ranch house that he built in 1914, and his son Oscar lived in a small wood frame cabin on the north side of the road that bisects the ranch. When Oscar married Opal Riddle, who lived on the Riddle Ranch about six miles south, he exchanged houses with his father. Richard Dunlap, Oscar and Opal's son, was born at the ranch in 1920. [12]

The acreage that comprises the Dunlap Ranch was filed upon by both Charles and Oscar Dunlap. Oscar Dunlap received his homestead patent on April 22, 1918, for the SW/SW/SE Section 30, T48N-R71W. Charles Dunlap received his homestead patent on June 6, 1918, for the NW/NW/NE Section 31, T48N-R71W, which is the parcel on which most of the structures are located. Charles Dunlap died on October 28, 1928, at the age of seventy-seven,

after suffering severe heat prostration the previous August. He is buried in the Mount Pisgah Cemetery in Gillette. [13]

In 1930, the parcel patented by Charles Dunlap passed to his son Oscar. The ranch, consisting of both homestead parcels as well as additional holdings procured over the years, remained in the Dunlap family until 1974, when it was purchased by Meadowlark Farms, Inc.

During the 1910s and 1920s, Charles and Oscar Dunlap built up their ranch, constructing dwellings, barns, and various outbuildings. They raised white-faced cattle and forage crops, such as wheat, oats, and corn. The work was done with the aid of about forty work horses. The average size of the cattle herd numbered about 125 cows plus their calves. The Dunlaps, although not far from Gillette, were comparatively self-sufficient, raising a large garden for vegetables, and hogs, milk cows, and chickens for meat, milk, cream, butter, and eggs. Any excess produce was taken to town and traded for groceries, and cream was sold to outlets in Nebraska via the railroad. [14]

Water was a major consideration, and before they dug a well, the Dunlaps had to transport water in a barrel with a horse and wagon from a spring near the Douglas-Gillette road. In the 1920s they dug a well east of the older ranch house. They planted about one thousand trees, attempting to establish windrows and shade around the dwellings. They had to painstakingly carry water bucket by bucket from the well. Most of the trees died, but they did manage to establish a number of Chinese elms and a grove of poplars behind the ranch house. In order to assure water for their livestock, the Dunlaps dug nine stock ponds with a fresno and team of horses. [15]

As the Dunlaps later realized, their ranch was located on one of the largest coal deposits in the United States. Therefore, it is not surprising that they dug coal out of exposed coal seams in banks within a few miles of the ranch and used it for fuel. Other subsistence strategies consisted of raising 200 to 300 chickens. They used the hens for laying eggs and the roosters for eating. They also maintained a hog house (now gone) on the west side of the barn and butchered four to five hogs a year, which they sugar-cured and canned. [16]

As if the Depression were not hard enough on subsistence ranchers, Oscar Dunlap lost his eyesight in about 1933. With only two percent vision, he began to rely on his son Richard to run the ranch. The Dunlaps managed to hold onto their ranch during the Depression when so many other homesteaders failed, although at times they were forced to cut Russian thistle to

feed the cattle. In fact, they gradually increased their holdings by buying up half-sections that became available when the ranchers or homesteaders failed or moved on. Oscar Dunlap did not believe in debt or in paying interest, and would only buy land when he could afford to do so outright. He sold some of the land for a small profit, but eventually he claimed ownership of over 3000 acres; he also leased additional land for grazing. [17]

When Richard Dunlap reached high school age, he moved to Gillette and boarded with his uncle Earl Dunlap so that he could receive an education. He returned to the ranch, and in 1945 Richard was married. He continued to live at the ranch, where he raised three children. The ranch did not get electricity or a telephone until about 1950. For a few years before that, they had a 32-volt generator for lights. There was a small rural school about two miles east of the ranch, but when the teacher resigned and the school closed in about 1960, Richard Dunlap moved his family to Gillette. Thereafter, he ran the ranch on a part-time basis, and the family stayed there weekends and summers. Richard eventually added Herefords to the Dunlap cattle herds.

Oscar Dunlap (William Oscar) passed away on June 10, 1980, at the age of eighty-eight, and is also buried in the Mount Pisgah Cemetery in Gillette. Richard Dunlap currently resides in Gillette. [18]

The Dunlap Ranch is representative of the early twentieth century dry land farming/ranching/homesteading era on the semi-arid lands of Campbell County and the Powder River region of northeastern Wyoming. The original and early structures document the evolution of the ranch from two pioneer homesteads to a successful cattle ranching operation that survived the Great Depression. The two original homestead dwellings are still intact, as are nearly all of the barns and outbuildings. Furthermore, the ranch was owned and operated by the same family, the Dunlaps, throughout its existence (1914-1974). The site retains good environmental integrity with no modern intrusions and therefore conveys feeling and association with its period of historical significance.

B. CURRENT PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION OF THE DUNLAP RANCH

The Dunlap Ranch is located on gently rolling sagebrush covered plains north of Caballo Creek, an intermittent drainage, and southwest of Duck Nest Creek. The ranch complex consists of ten original or early structures and one dwelling constructed in

1951 (see Photos WY-112-1 to WY-112-4). The majority of the buildings are clustered on the south side of Bishop Road, an east-west trending gravel road that also marks the line between Sections 30 and 31. The components on the north side of the road consist of an original wood frame homestead cabin, a chicken coop, and orderly storage areas for farm equipment and machinery, and railroad ties, lumber, fenceposts, and other building materials. The site retains hand-planted tree rows and ornamentals around the buildings, consisting of Chinese elms, Russian olives, and honey locusts.

A storage area is located east-northeast of the homestead cabin, consisting of railroad ties, poles, a hay rake, 2"x4" dimensional lumber, 24+ clear glass electrical insulators, farm machinery parts, 50-gallon drums, a wagon front axle, the undercarriage to a wooden wagon, cement blocks, corrugated tin, a rubber-tired trailer/wagon with a metal body, and a seed planter/drill made by American Seeding, Springfield, Ohio.

A second farm machinery storage area is located along the north side of a tree row near the northern perimeter of the ranch complex. Most of the equipment is modern and consists of a rubber tired hay baler, a rake, a seeder (Dempster of Beatrice, Nebraska), a mower, a Noble Multi-Tiller made in Iowa, a cement block pile, a John Deere tiller, a mower with iron wheels, a rubber tire vehicle chassis, a plow/harrow, heavy gauge wire cages, and an old Buick truck chassis with a flathead engine and rubber tires.

IV. ENDNOTES

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2. T.A. Larson, History of Wyoming (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978), p.361.

3. Ibid., p. 362.

4. Wyoming State Planning Board, Public Domain in Wyoming (Cheyenne: State Planning Board, 1938), p. 118.

5. Census of the State of Wyoming, 1905 and 1915; Larson, History of Wyoming, p. 323; Dena S. Markoff, Cultural Resources of the Black Thunder Mine Permit Area, Southern Campbell County, Wyoming (Boulder, Colorado: Western Cultural Resource Management, Inc., May 1981), pp. 107-117.

6. Janet LeCompte and Jane L. Anderson, History of Northern Campbell County and the Rawhide Mine Permit Area, Wyoming (Longmont, Colorado: Pioneer Archaeological Consultants, 1982), pp. D-2-132-133.

7. James C. Olson, History of Nebraska (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1955), p. 296.

8. LeCompte and Anderson, History of Northern Campbell County, pp. D-2-136-137.

9. U.S. Forest Service, Multiple Use Plans: Thunder Basin (Laramie: Medicine Bow National Forest, Supervisor's Office, 1965); Resettlement Administration, First Annual Report (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1936), pp. 3, 21, 126.

10. U.S. Statutes at Large, 73rd Congress, Vol. 48; p. 1269.

11. Frederick Merk, History of the Western Movement (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), p. 610.

12. Richard Dunlap (son of William Oscar Dunlap), Telephonic Communication, Gillette, Wyoming, 10/15/90; Obituary of C.O. Dunlap, The News-Record, Gillette, Wyoming, 11/1/1928.

13. "Memorandum of Title," Dunlap Ranch, Rocky Mountain Title Insurance Agency, Gillette, Wyoming, 1983; Obituary, C.O. Dunlap.

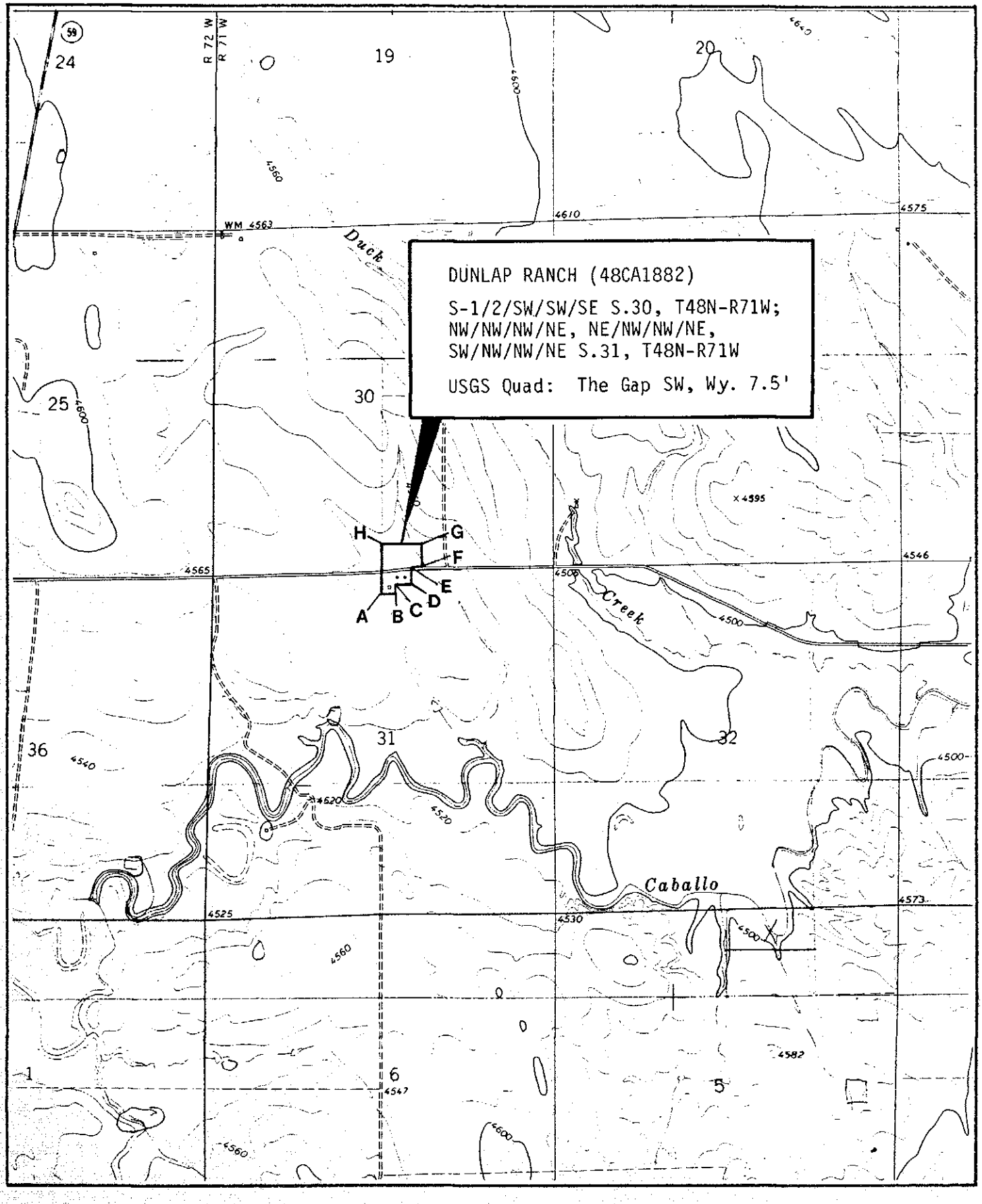
14. Richard Dunlap Communication.

15. Idem.

16. Idem.

17. Idem.

18. Obituary of W.O. Dunlap, The News Record, Gillette, Wyoming, 6/12/1980.


DUNLAP RANCH (48CA1882)
S-1/2/SW/SW/SE S.30, T48N-R71W;
NW/NW/NW/NE, NE/NW/NW/NE,
SW/NW/NW/NE S.31, T48N-R71W
USGS Quad: The Gap SW, Wy. 7.5'
R 72 W
R 71 W
19
20
24
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30
31
32
36
1
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WM 4563
Duck
Creek
Caballo
A
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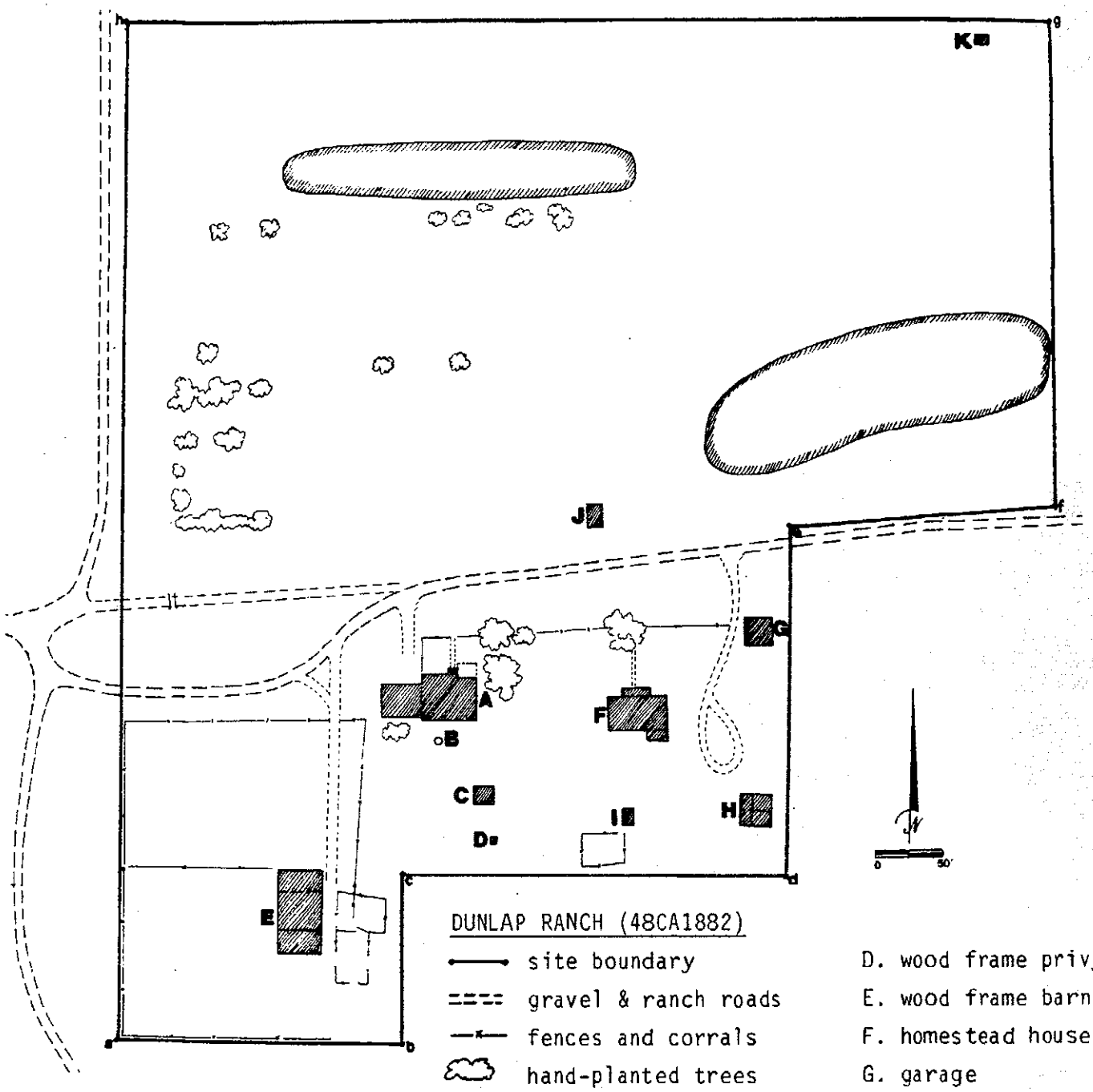

DUNLAP RANCH (48CA1882)

site boundary
gravel & ranch roads
fences and corrals
hand-planted trees
ranch equipment storage area

A. cement block ranch house
B. metal windmill tower & fan
C. wood frame bunkhouse
D. wood frame privy
E. wood frame barn
F. homestead house
G. garage
H. chicken coop
I. pumphouse
J. homestead cabin
K. chicken coop